

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. Economy Grew \$6.5 Billion More than Reported in Quarter Two

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 29 August 2012

Washington — The U.S. economy grew more than initially estimated from April to June as gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 1.7 percent, according to a new Commerce Department report.

The August 29 report by the Bureau of Economic Analysis shows a 0.2 percent, or \$6.5 billion, increase in U.S. economic growth during the period — higher than originally reported in the department's advance quarterly estimate, released July 27.

The new figure uses more complete source data to calculate the GDP, or total output of goods and services produced by the country.

The report confirms that the U.S. economy posted its 12th straight quarter of positive growth, which acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank has said largely coincides with 28 straight months of private sector employment gains that have totaled 4.4 million new jobs.

In a statement following the advance estimate's release last month, Blank said the second-quarter growth "shows that our economy continues to heal from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression."

The second-quarter growth in GDP primarily reflected positive contributions from personal consumption expenditures, exports, nonresidential fixed investment and residential fixed investment. These gains were partly offset by negative contributions from private inventory investment and from state and local government spending. Imports, which are a subtraction in the calculation of GDP, increased.

Growth from April to June came in slightly lower than growth during the first three months of the year, which totaled 2 percent. This deceleration in growth from the first to second quarter primarily reflected decelerations in personal consumption expenditures, nonresidential fixed investment and residential fixed investment that were partly offset by a smaller decrease in federal government spending, an acceleration in exports and a smaller decrease in private inventory investment.

Exports of goods and services increased 6 percent in the second quarter, compared with an increase of 4.4 percent in the first. The report said imports of goods and services increased 2.9 percent during the same period, compared with an increase of 3.1 from January to March.

The next revision of quarterly growth statistics is

scheduled to be released September 27.

Rover Sends Human Voice and Panoramic View from Mars

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 28 August 2012

Washington — The human voice has been transmitted from Mars across the solar system to Earth for the first time.

The rover Curiosity carried a recording from NASA Director Charles Bolden when the craft landed on the red planet August 6 (August 5 at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory control center). At a news briefing August 27, the director's voice came through loud and clear after its journey across millions of kilometers of empty space.

Bolden said exploration of Mars with the laboratory equipment aboard the rover — the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) — will increase our understanding of Mars and our own planet as well.

"Curiosity will bring benefits to Earth and inspire a new generation of scientist and explorers as it prepares the way for a human mission in the not too distant future," Bolden's message said.

NASA's Curiosity program executive, Dave Lavery, said the transmission from Mars is a further step toward extending humanity's presence beyond its home planet.

"As Curiosity continues its mission, we hope these words will be an inspiration to someone alive today who will become the first to stand upon the surface of Mars," Lavery said. "And like the great Neil Armstrong, they will speak aloud of that next giant leap in human exploration."

Neil Armstrong was the first person to set foot on the moon in 1969 with the words "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." That breakthrough moment in human achievement has been refreshed in the public memory in recent days with Armstrong's death on August 25.

NASA unveiled a new panoramic photo of the Martian surface surrounding the rover, one with greater clarity and detail than any sent since the landing three weeks ago. The composite photograph shows the ground at the base of Curiosity, then stretches across a plane to a rising mountain in the distance.

Michael Malin, the principal investigator of the Mast Camera (Mastcam) instrument that took the photographs, characterized them as "geologically exciting" and "pretty," though he acknowledged adjusting the colors to be softer and less stark than they probably appear on the

surface.

The spot where Curiosity landed — Gale Crater — was carefully chosen from a wide selection of potential sites revealed by views of the planet collected by the orbiters that NASA has had circling the planet for some years. John Grotzinger, MSL project scientist, said the panoramic photo affirms the choice of the location, as it reveals geologic features of great scientific interest.

“Although the anticipated scenic beauty was not something that was at the top of the list for reasons to select it, it was certainly one thing that we were hoping would come through one day,” Grotzinger said at the press briefing. “It’s awesome to see this.”

Mount Sharp is one scientific target seen in the photograph, a mountain about 5 kilometers high in the center of the large crater. The striations of rock and soil seen in the foothills of the mountain are expected to tell part of the planet’s history. Research and analysis from previous missions led to the conclusion that Mars was once wetter and warmer than it is today.

The Sample Analysis at Mars (SAM) team reported that its instruments have been put through preliminary testing indicating that they too reached the Martian surface without damage. This machine carries several analytic tools that will allow collection of chemical samples from the planet. While the cameras may be the eyes of Curiosity, SAM is the nose, said team leader Paul Mahaffey. SAM’s equipment will test the chemical composition of the surface atmosphere and other gases that may exude from rocks and soil.

All of Curiosity’s data collection would be for naught without the capability to transmit the data back to JPL scientists for analysis. The Curiosity communications team has organized the orbiters into a network of telecommunications relay orbiters that collect data from the rover and convey it back to Earth. JPL has received about 7 billion bytes of data in the three weeks of the mission, more than double the amount received from previous rovers at this early point in their missions.

Curiosity is working a two-year assignment on Mars, collecting data to determine if and when the Mars climate and habitat might have supported some form of life.

Secretary Clinton to Attend Pacific Islands Forum Talks, APEC Forum

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 28 August 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will attend two significant Asia-Pacific forums in the span of two weeks, beginning in the Cook Islands and ending

in Vladivostok, Russia, the U.S. State Department said August 28.

Clinton begins her two-week trip in the Cook Islands for the Pacific Islands Forum's Post Forum Dialogue on August 31, and then travels to Indonesia, China, Timor-Leste, Brunei and finally Russia, department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

Clinton’s attendance at the Pacific Islands Forum talks is part of “our intensive engagement and ongoing collaboration with the Pacific Islands. Her visit will emphasize the depth and breadth of American engagement across economic, people-to-people, strategic, environmental and security interests,” Nuland said.

The Pacific Islands Forum is a group of 16 independent, self-governing states. The members include Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It was founded in 1971 as the South Pacific Forum, but in 2000 the name was changed.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat is based in Suva, Fiji, and the current secretary-general is Tuiloma Neroni Slade of Samoa.

Since 1989, the United States and 13 other dialogue partners have met in a Post Forum Dialogue at the foreign minister level.

Nuland said in her prepared statement that the visit by the secretary represents “a concerted effort to strengthen regional multilateral institutions, develop bilateral partnerships, and build on alliances — three core elements of U.S. strategy toward the Asia-Pacific.” Clinton is leading the highest-level U.S. interagency delegation in the 41-year Forum history with senior officials from the departments of State, Defense and Interior, Nuland said.

On September 3, Clinton meets with senior Indonesian officials in Jakarta at the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership. Nuland said the talks will focus on engagements on regional and global issues.

Clinton travels to Beijing September 4–5 for meetings with senior Chinese leaders on a wide range of issues critical to U.S.-China relations, Nuland said. It is part of U.S. efforts to build a cooperative partnership, including preparations for the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum that is being hosted by the Russian government in Vladivostok.

Clinton will become the first U.S. secretary of state to

travel to Dili on September 6, and in meetings scheduled with senior officials will emphasize U.S. support for Timor-Leste. Nuland said Clinton will next meet with senior Brunei officials to emphasize “the importance of the increasingly vibrant U.S.-Brunei relationship.” While in Brunei Clinton will highlight the U.S.-Brunei English Language Enrichment Project for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and discuss Brunei’s 2013 chairmanship of ASEAN.

Clinton is leading the U.S. delegation to the annual APEC Economic Leaders Meeting September 8–9 in Vladivostok.

“The secretary will discuss trade liberalization, food security and green growth, including initiatives to fight wildlife trafficking,” Nuland said.

While in Vladivostok, Clinton will meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. She last met with Lavrov in June in St. Petersburg, Russia.

APEC is a 21-member forum that is focused on economic growth and trade, regional economic integration, and economic and technical cooperation.

General Allen on Building Peace in Afghanistan

28 August 2012

This op-ed by U.S. Marine General John R. Allen, the commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, was originally published in the Washington Post on August 24. There are no republication restrictions for use by U.S. embassies.

Kabul — We can achieve what we set out to do in Afghanistan, defeating al-Qaeda and denying it a haven, but that depends on achieving an Afghanistan that can stand on its own.

I recently attended a celebration here to commemorate Afghanistan’s 93rd year of independence. I was struck by the hope and the strengthening of the Afghans’ national identity and their determination to grip their country’s future. Most Americans do not get to see Afghans’ commitment to their country or the improving security that has emerged from our fight together. But I do. And I am confident that, with the international community’s commitment, we can consolidate our gains and build a durable peace in a part of the world vital to U.S. national security.

This moment in Afghan history has arrived not by accident or luck but in the wake of powerful events: the growing strength and capability of Afghan security forces; the signing of bilateral and multilateral strategic partnerships; and the international community’s pledge of substantial support for the next decade.

These accomplishments have been borne on the backs of remarkable allied and Afghan forces — those serving today and those who have gone before. Their tremendous sacrifices are creating security conditions that, finally, are bringing a real sense of confidence to the Afghan people.

We will not allow our efforts to be derailed by the so-called “green-on-blue” attacks — Afghans shooting coalition troops — that have received so much attention recently. Each instance is a tragedy, and we mourn every loss. I have stood on the ramps of airfields here as we’ve sent home our fallen heroes. I take personally the loss of every member of the International Security Assistance Force. Afghan and international leaders at all levels are devoting unprecedented time and effort to reduce this threat. We have implemented measures to better protect our troops; we have helped build an Afghan force of close to 350,000; and Afghans are leading security operations in three-quarters of the country. This momentum is irreversible.

But the real story here is green and blue. Every day, hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police across this nation work and fight side by side with coalition troops to defeat our common enemies and protect the civilian population. We interact closely on numerous operations, extending security for the Afghan people.

The focus on “green-on-blue” attacks obscures the callous slaughter of Afghan civilians by insurgents led by Mohammad Omar. He has the blood of innocents on his hands even though he hypocritically tells his subordinates not to attack civilians. Either he is out of touch, or his forces are out of control. Perhaps that should be no surprise. Omar lives in Pakistan, as do many of his “commanders.” From that safe vantage point, they’ve sent hundreds of young, impressionable, largely spiritual and helpless youths to their deaths and detention in Afghanistan. For this, they must forfeit their honor and any claim to Islamic virtue.

And they are losing. “Green” and “blue” have been taking the fight to the red enemy, the Taliban, and the enemy is fighting back from a position of weakness. His forces have largely been ejected from most of the relevant population areas, and from among the most relevant terrain in Afghanistan, the Afghan people. Omar is losing financial support from donors, who are sending their money elsewhere, and from reduced drug profits, thanks to Afghan and coalition efforts to stamp out the poppy harvest. Finally, Afghan security forces are increasing in number and quality every day. The area controlled by allied and Afghan forces reaches into Taliban support zones that had long been inaccessible. With each atrocity, assassination and depredation inflicted on innocent Afghans, the insurgents further distance themselves from

the Afghan people and their faith, for there is a distinctive Islamic prohibition against murdering innocent civilians or benefiting from the scourge of drugs and abject criminality.

This is playing out in another important color combination: white on red. The Afghan population is organizing to drive the hated Taliban from their villages. This movement is emerging in areas where the heavy hand of the Taliban has created a popular groundswell against the insurgents.

These trends speak well for the future of Afghanistan, but the international community should know these gains are fragile, and reversible, if we lose our will to succeed.

U.S., allied and Afghan security forces will continue to deal with “green-on-blue” attacks. We will mourn our precious dead, but we will not permit this threat to derail the progress being made by coalition and Afghan forces. We also resolve to protect the civilian population, the “white,” from the scourge of the Taliban, the “red.”

This struggle is far from over, but the solution will be found in our growing strength and will not be defined by incidents of “green-on-blue” violence. Our cause is right, our determination is clear and our sacrifices have not been in vain. We are, in fact, prevailing.

(John R. Allen is commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force and U.S. forces in Afghanistan.)

Russia's WTO Accession Is “Good News,” U.S. Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 24 August 2012

Washington — U.S. officials congratulated Russia for its formal accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and said the move brings one of the world's fastest-growing markets under the rules of the global trading system and will help increase trade between Russia and the United States.

“It’s not only good news for Russia; we also think it’s good news for American companies and workers,” State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters in Washington August 22.

Nuland said Americans have been “strong and long champions of Russia coming into the WTO,” and have sought “for many years to work through our issues and to see this day.”

Russia began its accession process in June 1993, and its WTO membership was approved by all of the organization’s members on December 16, 2011. Its formal accession on August 22 occurred 30 days after the Russian government officially notified the WTO Secretariat that it

had completed the ratification process.

During the negotiations over its accession, the United States and other WTO members called on Russia to dismantle protective trade barriers and state subsidies, according to press reports. These reports have speculated that Russia will cut its average import tariff by 5.9 percent and make imported products cheaper for Russian consumers.

In addition, the World Bank has estimated that Russia’s entry into the WTO, whose members carry out 97 percent of global trade, could increase its gross domestic product by an extra 3.3 percent over the next three years.

As a member of the WTO, Russia is expected to establish predictable tariff rates, ensure transparency in its trade legislation and be part of the organization’s trade dispute settlement process.

U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Ron Kirk and acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank each issued congratulatory statements to Russia August 22. Blank said Russia’s WTO membership “brings its over 140 million consumers and a \$1.8 trillion economy into the global rules-based trading system.”

Both officials also called on the U.S. Congress to terminate the 1974 Jackson-Vanik trade restrictions against Russia and to authorize permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) between the two countries.

The law's provisions have been waived by every U.S. president since 1994. According to the USTR, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee approved a bill that would terminate the application of the Jackson-Vanik amendment on July 19 and would authorize President Obama to extend PNTR to Russia. A similar bill was passed by the U.S. House of Representative Ways and Means Committee on July 26.

In a June 19 essay in the Wall Street Journal, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the termination of Jackson-Vanik and a PNTR agreement with Russia would be “an investment in the more open and prosperous Russia that we want to see develop.” Clinton also said Russia's middle class has been calling for “a more transparent and accountable government, a more modern political system, and a diversified economy,” and the United States “should support these Russian efforts.”

Clinton said trade between the United States and Russia has increased in recent years, but “isn't reaching anything close to its full potential today,” with U.S. exports to Russia amounting to less than 1 percent of its global exports.

According to press reports, Russia was the world's ninth-largest exporter in 2011, shipping \$522 billion in goods and \$54 billion in services to other nations, while importing \$323 billion in goods and \$90 billion in services.

Extending PNTR and increasing trade levels will create new economic opportunities for American businesses and "support the political and economic changes that Russia's people are demanding," Clinton said. Such changes, she added, also will "ultimately make Russia a more just and open society as well as a better partner over the long term for the U.S."

Russia will host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok on September 2-9. According to APEC's website, member economies, international organizations and business leaders will discuss trade and investment liberalization, regional economic integration, ways to strengthen food security and establish reliable supply chains, and how to intensify cooperation to foster innovative growth.

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